



Commissioner's

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Comments

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Standing with Courage

Courage is a trait and a value. It's a value I have discussed before in this blog.

Today, I want to discuss a different kind of courage than the courage to do the right thing. I want to discuss the inspirational type of courage. It is the kind of courage that I have had the great opportunity to witness first hand and I would like to share it with all of you.

February 28 was rare disease day. It gave me a nice reminder of an incredible individual, Ashley Kurpiel. Ashley has Fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva (FOP). Since she was a small child, her connective tissue, ligaments and even muscle have been slowly turning to bone. When she was little, her doctors did not know what she had and diagnosed her with cancer. They removed her right arm thinking that was the best course of action. Unfortunately it exacerbated the problem.

I had the pleasure to teach Ashley when she was in about 10th grade. She was bright, bubbly and eternally optimistic. Certainly, many people could have felt sorry for Ashley or any child facing a challenging disability, but I would encourage us not to. Ashley has had TV specials done on her, traveled the world, surfed, met thousands of people, and maybe her most enjoyable activity, she owns and drives a golf cart. She has worked tirelessly to bring awareness to FOP, be a mentor for others with it, and all along has kept that beautiful smile. How many of us get worn down with our daily lives and want to give in to despair? How many of us see the challenges ahead and cower?

I am inspired by Ashley. I am inspired to smile in the face of adversity. I am inspired to stand for what is right. I am inspired to be the voice for all of our children, but especially those who cannot use their own voice.

We all should have Ashley's courage. We all should be inspired by her and the thousands like her that face each day with a vision for the future.

There is a lot of change going on in Kentucky right now; some exciting, some scary. I am going to choose to be like Ashley. I am going to choose to move Kentucky forward with courage and boldly make decisions that will give every student a chance for a great education. You don't have to have a rare disease to have courage, you simply need to have the heart for it. Kentucky has the heart, as pointed out in a poem by Jesse Stuart, "If these United States can be called a body, then Kentucky can be called its heart."

Thank you Ashley, for showing me what courage looks like, and reminding all Kentuckians that they have the heart to stand with courage in the face of change.